

Parenting Before Their Time:

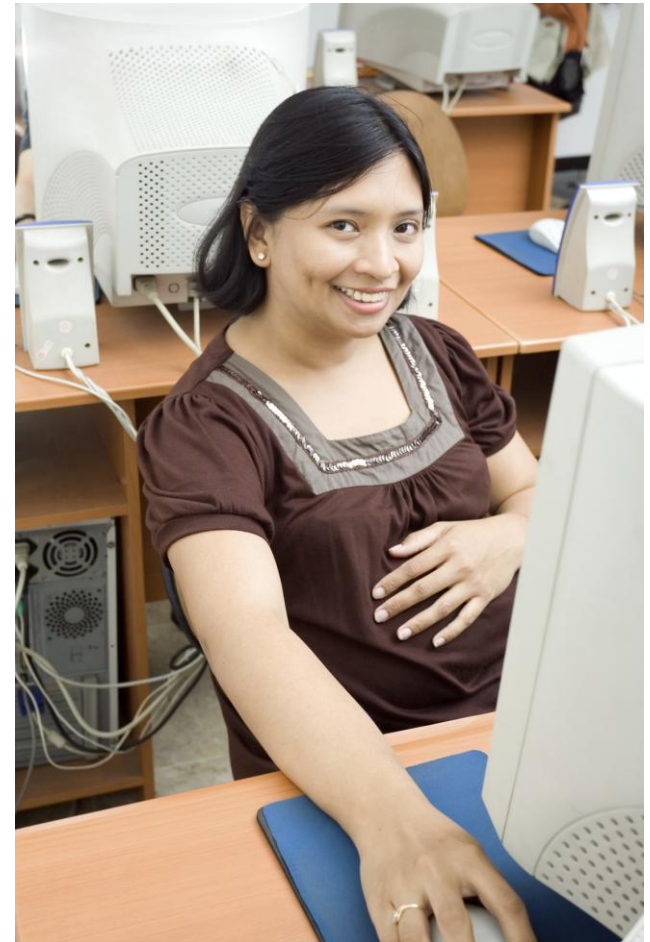
The Implications of Early Childbearing on Adolescent Development



Amanda Berger, Ph.D.

April 24, 2013

- Adolescence is marked by remarkable physical, cognitive, and interpersonal changes.
 - Understanding these changes (and what is “normative”) can help program providers serving adolescents and emerging adults.
- Early childbearing can have considerable implications for adolescent development.



- In some cultures, the transition to adolescence is marked by rites of passage, puberty rites, or ceremonies.
- Many expect young people to start acting like adults quite abruptly, but the timing of this transition is ambiguous.



- What to expect during adolescent development...
 - From childhood to early adolescence...
 - Individuation and differentiation
 - Appreciation of diverse self-attributes and traits
 - Integration of past, present, and future roles
 - Fragile sense of self
 - Early to late adolescence...
 - More sophisticated understanding of self
 - Integration of contradictory aspects of self
 - Decline of fragility in sense of self

How do these stages relate to teen pregnancy?

- Early Adolescence (~11-13 years)

When adolescents go through puberty, they are capable of getting pregnant/getting someone pregnant!

- Middle Adolescence (~14-16 years)

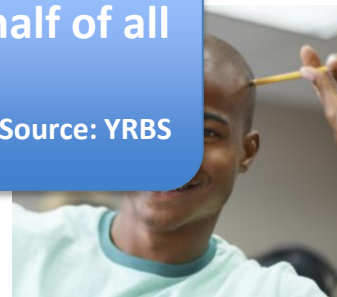
With increasing independence comes more time to engage in sex– half of all high school students have had sexual intercourse!

Source: YRBS

- Late Adolescence (~17-19 years)

1 out of 6 girls has a birth before age 20... and early childbearing can disrupt college and career preparation!

Source: National Vital Statistics



of
scnt

- As children become adolescents, many changes can be expected:
 - Physical
 - Growth spurts, hormone changes, sexual maturation.
 - Social/emotional
 - Conflict with parents, desire to spend more time with peers, more intimate relationships with friends/romantic partners, a quest for independence.
 - Cognitive/neurological
 - Changes in brain structure, increases in abstract, idealistic, and logical thinking.

Physical Development



- Puberty is key part of adolescence; many believe it marks the start of adolescence. It can include:
 - Internal changes, which directly affect feelings, behaviors, and sexual desire.
 - For girls, these can include anger and depression.
 - For boys, these can include anger and irritability.
 - External changes, which can affect body image and reactions from other people.

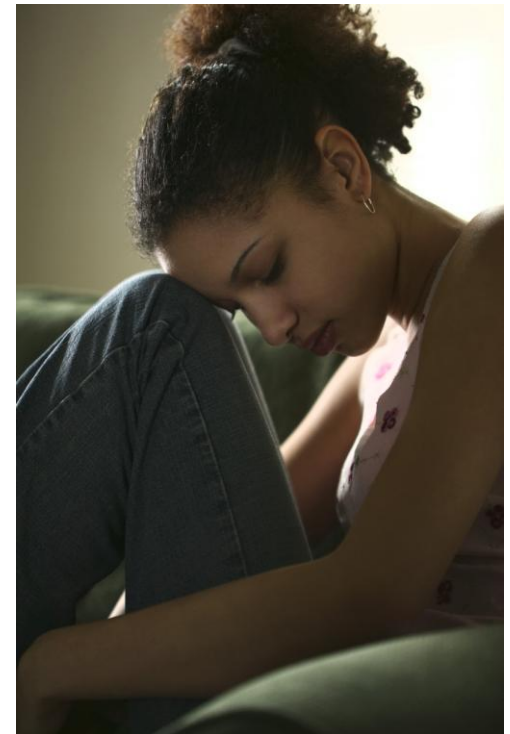


- Puberty is...
 - Not a single event, but an extended period that starts when hormones begin changing and ends when sex organs and other sex characteristics are developed.
 - Marked for girls by menarche (onset of menstruation)
 - Marked for boys by spermarche (first ejaculation of mobile sperm)
 - When an adolescent changes from a sexually “immature” person to one who is capable of getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant.

- Physical changes during puberty include:
 - Primary sexual characteristics
 - Features directly related to reproduction
 - Example: the onset of menstruation or the beginning of sperm production
 - Secondary sexual characteristics
 - Features that differentiate adult males from adult females, but are not directly involved in reproduction
 - Example: body hair



- Puberty is sometimes linked to problem behaviors, especially for early-maturing girls:
 - Truancy
 - Academic trouble
 - Drug and alcohol use
 - Running away
 - Shoplifting
 - Negative body image
 - Older romantic partners
 - Sexual risk taking and pregnancy



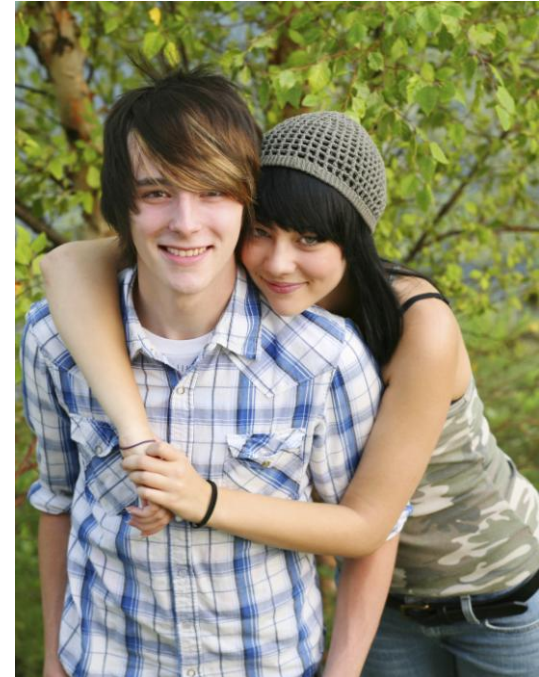
Social/Emotional Development



- Some socio-emotional changes that emerge during adolescence:
 - Increasing autonomy/need for autonomy
 - Fragility of self
 - Perceptions of physical invulnerability
 - Exploration and refinement of self-concepts and identity
 - More complex relationships/interactions with others
 - Increased self-reflection and more complex emotions

- In adolescence...

- Most teens begin dating, and roughly half have sex by the time they finish high school.
- Teens spend double the time with friends as they do with their parents.
- Belonging to a group/following group norms is very important.
- But virtually all of their relationships are forced to change when a teen has a baby...



- What do teen moms have to say?



- Emotion is closely connected to self-esteem and can contribute to identity.
- Adolescence is a time when emotional highs and lows occur more frequently.



POLL QUESTION

- Which of the following is true for adolescent emotions?
 - Moodiness is normal.
 - Intensely negative emotions can reflect serious problems.
 - Unhappiness generally represents inner turmoil, not conflict.
 - As adolescents mature, moods become less extreme.
 - All of the above.



- These questions, not usually considered in childhood, are virtually universal concerns in adolescence:
 - Who am I?
 - What am I all about?
 - What is different about me?
 - How can I make it on my own?
 - What am I going to do with my life?



- One of the key milestones in adolescence is identity achievement!
- Identity achievement involves:
 - Deliberate effort on the part of adolescents to find their place in the world.
 - Personality and role experimentation.
- Having an early pregnancy can affect how adolescents explore identities and roles and can have implications for how they view themselves/how others view them!

- Four stages of identity development:
 - Diffusion: not engaged in figuring out an adult identity for self
 - Foreclosure: commitment to certain roles and values without going through a period of crisis
 - Moratorium: exploring options for identity, but no commitment yet
 - Achievement: commitment to certain roles and values after active exploration

- Identity represents a personal sense of an integrated, coherent, goal-directed self:
 - Political
 - Religious
 - Relationship
 - Cultural
 - Physical
 - Sexual
 - Intellectual
 - Vocational
- Consider how having a baby affects these identities...



- Which of these does your program focus the most on?
 - Political identity
 - Relationship identity
 - Cultural identity
 - Physical identity
 - Sexual identity
 - Intellectual identity
 - Vocational identity

- What do teen moms have to say?



Cognitive/Neurological Development



- Relatively recent advances in neuroscience have revealed that considerable changes occur in the brain during the second decade of life.
 - This contradicts the long-held idea that the brain is nearly "formed" by the end of childhood.
 - There is still much to learn about adolescent brains, especially relationships with genetics/environments.

- Changes to brain structure include:
 - Corpus callosum thickens, improving efficiency, ability to process information.
 - Amygdala, which controls emotion, changes.
 - Prefrontal cortex grows, furthering the ability to form ideas and strategies, make decisions, set priorities, and control impulses/attention.

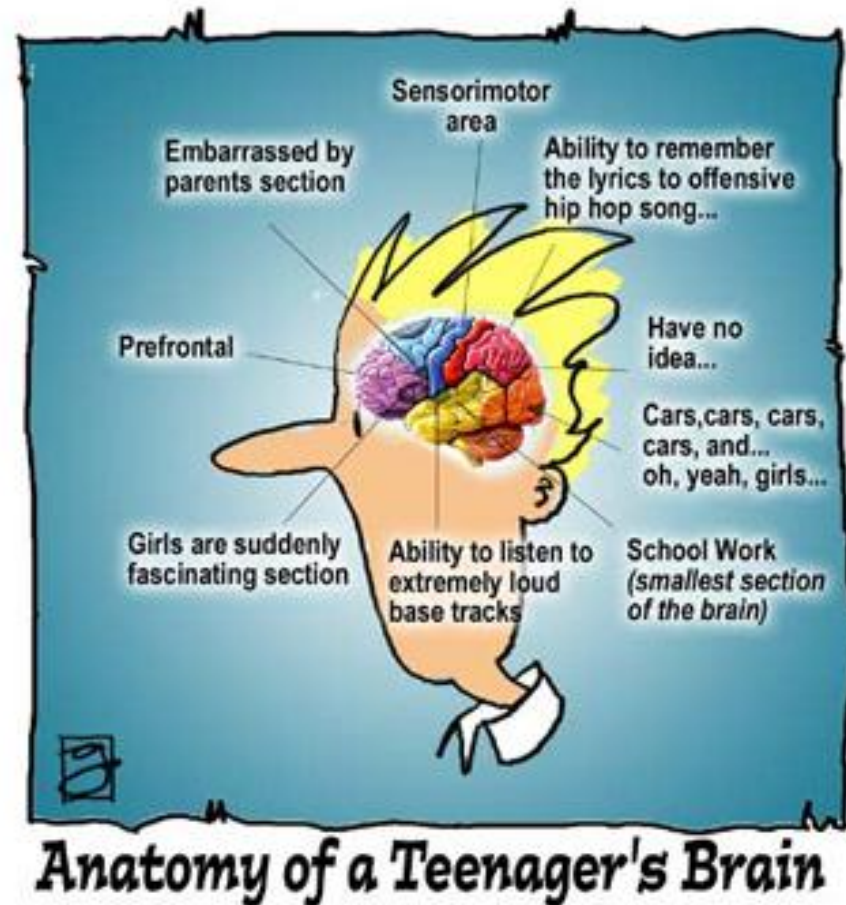


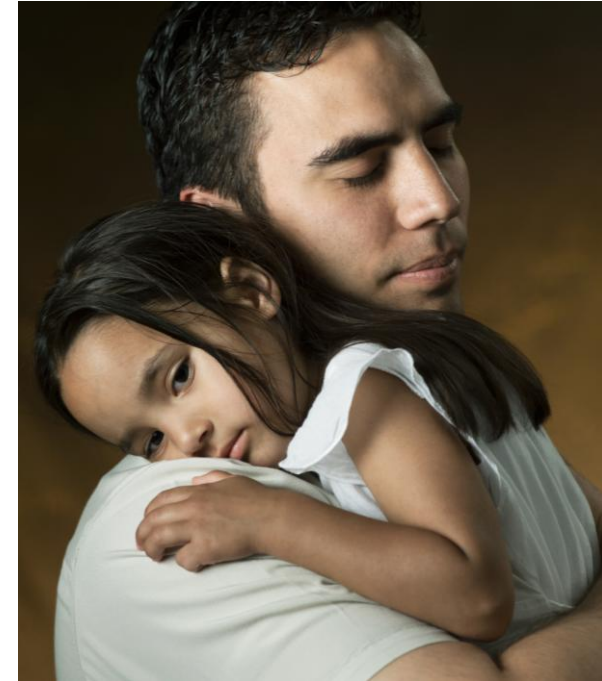
Image: Gary Olsen

- Neurological changes include more complex and efficient brain structures and neural connections.
 - New neurons/brain cells are generated (neurogenesis).
 - Brains demonstrate greater plasticity.
 - Neural connections that remain become stronger/allow for greater and more complex abilities.
 - Neural connections that are no longer needed disappear, allowing for greater brain efficiency.

- Cognitive improvements include:
 - Improved selective and divided attention.
 - Improved short- and long-term memory.
 - Ability to use metamemory and mnemonic strategies.
 - Automatization of certain tasks and skills.
 - Development of moral thinking.
 - Ability to use hypothetico-deductive reasoning (when hypotheses, logic, abstract thinking can be used).

- The use of formal operational thinking and hypothetico-deductive reasoning is a major advancement in adolescence:
 - Two potential sub-periods?
 - Early (11-15) – too idealized, not balanced
 - Late (15+) – tempered by experience, more balanced
 - Not all adolescents/adults achieve this type of thinking or use it at all times - formal schooling plays a role.
 - Consider how hypothetico-deductive reasoning plays into the decision to have sex, use contraception, have a baby...

- Cognitive changes in adolescence ALSO affect abilities to:
 - Self-regulate and make decisions.
 - Plan, adapt, and consider future outcomes.
 - Regulate and gauge emotions.
 - Retrieve memories and details of past experiences.
 - Think contextually about situations.
 - Make “moral” decisions, which take into account one’s role in society.



- What do teen moms have to say?



- Adolescence is marked by unique cognitions:

Adolescent Egocentrism	Teenagers' assumptions that they are the focus of everyone's attention and that their experiences, thoughts, & feelings are unique.
Imaginary Audience	Teenagers' unjustified concern that they are the focus of others' attention.
Personal Fable	Teenagers' exaggerated belief in their own uniqueness.

POLL QUESTION

- Which of these socio-emotional reasons for not using contraception or having a teen pregnancy have you heard?

- I didn't think a girl like me could get pregnant.
- I thought having a baby would bring us closer.
- I wanted sex to be spontaneous.
- Contraceptives are unsafe.
- My parents might find out.
- I thought my partner would take care of that.
- Using it would tell everyone that I was planning to have sex.



- The transition to adulthood is long and complex – especially for young parents.
- Possible markers of adulthood include:
 - Economic independence and self-responsibility.
 - Independent decision making.
 - Deciding on one's own beliefs and values.
 - Establishing a relationship equal with parents.
- Early childbearing forces adolescents into adult roles – but they may not always be prepared!

- Reasons why input, guidance, and monitoring from caring adults still matters:
 - Adult cognitive responses tend to be more intellectual; adolescents responses tend to be “from the gut,” signifying the continued importance of adult input into teens’ decision-making.
 - There is evidence that adolescents can help shape their own brains – learning and positive experiences can both contribute to the development of complex, efficient, and adaptive brains!

- Questions?



We would like to thank Janet Max at Healthy Teen Network for providing the “teen mom” video clips and Kate Riera at the University of Delaware for her contribution to the content of the webinar.